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Rep. Ray LaHood (R-Ill.) proposed legislation yesterday that would prohibit lame-duck lawmakers from filing ethics complaints against another member.

LaHood's proposal was aimed at retiring freshman Rep. Chris Bell (D-Texas), who filed an ethics complaint Tuesday against House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) with the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct.

LaHood said his bill — offered as an amendment to the 2005 legislative-branch funding bill — would apply retroactively to include Bell's complaint. In a 187-page document, Bell charged DeLay with corruption, bribery and money-laundering.

Although the measure failed on a 5-5 tie vote in the Appropriations Legislative Branch Subcommittee, LaHood vowed to reintroduce it at the full committee markup, probably next week.

"This 'gotcha' type of politics does not reflect what I think this institution is about," he told The Hill. "We need to have a debate about whether to allow lame-duck members to taint the house and do things when a member like this isn't going to be around."

Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) bucked his party and cast the vote that effectively killed LaHood's amendment in subcommittee.

"Under our Constitution, we are elected to a two-year term, not an 18-month term" Kirk said at the markup. "Congressman Bell is no longer the popular congressman in his congressional district, even among the Democratic primary voters, but he was given a full two-year term in the 2002 election by his general-election voters."

Eric Burns, Bell's communications director, called LaHood's amendment proposal "irresponsible" and nothing more than a "political, partisan action." He also said it was introduced in an "inappropriate" manner.

Calling LaHood's amendment "a clear attempt to discredit the complaint filed against Tom DeLay," Burns added, "the right thing to do is allow the ethics committee to review this complaint and move forward with their investigation."

Burns also predicted that even if the amendment were to pass the House, it would be deemed unconstitutional.

Before urging LaHood to withdraw the amendment, Kirk said lawmakers "need to respect the mandate that was given in 2002 as well as the mandate of all 434 other members of" the House.

Democrats on the panel agreed. Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.) said the Standards Committee is responsible for determining the legitimacy of each complaint.

"This is clearly ex post facto," he said of the amendment proposal. "It is aimed at one person."

Rep. David Price (D-N.C.) said the amendment assumes that a departing member does not have the best interest of Congress or the American people at heart.

"I'm not prepared to assume that the motivations are pure of a member just because he is returning here," Price said, adding that lawmakers should not presume lame-duck members have impure motivations.

Although Appropriations Committee Chairman Bill Young (R-Fla.) said he would vote for the amendment if offered, he cautioned that "it's not really in our jurisdiction."

Young suggested that LaHood take up the issue with the Rules Committee.

Rep. John Culberson (R-Texas) said the proposal would “increase accountability” and suggested LaHood consider ways to limit the time frame in which departing members could file ethics complaints.

Subcommittee Chairman Jack Kingston (R-Ga.) also indicated his support for LaHood’s amendment. “If the amendment needs tweaking, I’d rather do it in the bill than out of the bill,” he said.

Under the legislation, the House would receive \$1 billion, the Capitol Police \$220 million, the Congressional Budget Office \$34 million, the Architect’s office \$340 million, the Library of Congress \$523 million, the GPO \$135 million and the General Accounting Office \$458 million.

The subcommittee also unanimously approved an amendment that would cease funding the newly created Capitol Police mounted unit. The 2004 legislative branch funding bill had included \$326,000 to start the department’s first-ever equestrian squad.

Kirk, who introduced the amendment, said dismantling the mounted unit would save the department \$1.8 million over the next 10 years.

Describing the equestrian unit as a logistical nightmare in terms of stabling the horses and cleaning up manure, Kirk declared, “I think this mounted unit is more of a police fashion accessory rather than terrorist protection for the Congress.”